



COUNTY OF CASSIA

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

KERRY D. McMURRAY

County Administrator
kerrym@cassiacounty.org

COURTHOUSE
1459 Overland Avenue
BURLEY, IDAHO 83318

Phone: 208-878-7302
Fax: 208-878-9109
www.cassiacounty.org

April 30, 2008

Kurt Naccarato
Idaho Department of Lands

Via email to Knacarrato@idl.idaho.gov

Mr. Nacarrato:

At the behest of the Board of Commissioners for Cassia County, Idaho, I am writing to inform you that the Board approves the amendment of the Howell Canyon Project to the Cassia County Fire Plan. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With best regards,

Kerry D. McMurray

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Cassia County Administrator

cc: Julie Thomas

Cassia County CWPP Update – Howell Canyon Project - 2008

Objective of this Amendment Proposal

The primary objective of this proposed amendment is to identify the Howell Canyon project area as a *Wildland Urban Interface*. In doing so, the following two designations must also be made – Howell Canyon Road (Forest Road 549) needs to be designated as an *Evacuation Route*. The Thompson Flat Recreational Residence tract and the Pomerelle View Estates need to be designated as *Communities at Risk*. All three of these designations meet the federal standards for such.

Project Scope

The US Forest Service, Sawtooth National Forest, Minidoka Ranger District proposes a fuels reduction project to reduce the unnaturally high surface fuel loads in the canyon, increasing the amount of aspen reproduction found in the canyon, creating a zone of defensible space in Thompson Flats Recreation Residences, Campgrounds, and the Pomerelle View Estates, provide for forest land improvement through timber harvest, and introduce prescribed fire to timber stands in order to restore natural fire regimes.

The Minidoka Ranger District proposes this fuels reduction project be implemented, pending completion of NEPA, spring of 2009 and continuing until completed.

The Howell Canyon project area is approximately 1,383 acres in size. The project is located approximately 5 miles south of Albion, Idaho on the Albion Division of the Minidoka District of the Sawtooth National Forest. The area can be accessed by Howell Canyon Road (Forest Road 549), off of Idaho Highway 77. The general area is known as the Howell Canyon Recreational Complex.

The proposed treatments areas include portions of the following: T12S, R24E, Sections 35 and 36; T12S, R25E, Sections 31 and 32; T13S, R24E, Sections 1, 2, and 3; T13S, R25E, Sections 5 and 6.

Howell Canyon Road meets the definition of an Evacuation Route because:

1. It is the only paved ingress/egress road for the entire Howell Canyon Recreational Complex.
2. Howell Canyon Road (Forest Road 549) is the only road that provides access for Thompson Flat and Pomerelle View Estates.
3. Howell Canyon is used by an estimated average of 200,000 visitors per year.

The Thompson Flat Recreational Residence tract and the Pomerelle View Estates are identified in this amendment as Communities at Risk because:

1. Their close proximity to hazardous fuels and steep slopes,
2. They are a group of homes with basic infrastructure and utilities
3. They lie in a condition that is conducive to a large scale wildland fire event.

The Howell Canyon Fuels Reduction project area meets the HFRA definition of a Wildland Urban Interface because:

1. The project area lies within 0.5 miles of the above-mentioned Communities at Risk
2. The project area is adjacent to an Evacuation Route for a Community at Risk.
3. The project is identified in a CWPP.

Proposed Actions

Several agency actions are proposed for Howell Canyon;

1. Defensible Space treatments are proposed in order to provide for better wildfire protection. These treatments will reduce the risk of structure loss to wildfire; lessen the chance of fire escaping out of the home site, and increase safety for firefighters and the public in the event of a wildfire.
2. In the various campgrounds, dead and dying trees that pose a fire risk and physical risk to visitors will be removed mechanically.
3. Mechanical treatments will vary from clearcut treatment in lodgepole pine to various methods of grinding, masticating, crushing, or any other mechanical treatment that meets the intent of the project.
4. Aspen regeneration treatments will consist of slash and burn, slash and leave, or slash and remove.
5. Broadcast Prescribed fire may be utilized in any proposed treatment unit except for defensible space treatments.